

EMPOWERING MINDS:

A CAREGIVER'S GUIDE TO NURTURING MENTAL HEALTH IN CHILDREN

A valuable resource for parents, caregivers and educators, promoting children's emotional well-being, reducing stigma, and equipping them to support their children's mental health needs.

An essential tool for nurturing healthy development and resilience in young minds.

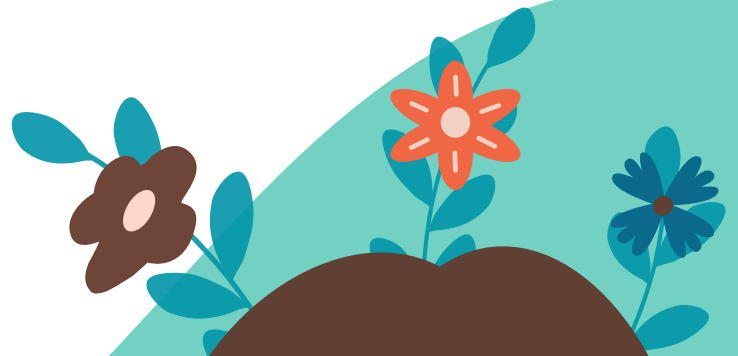


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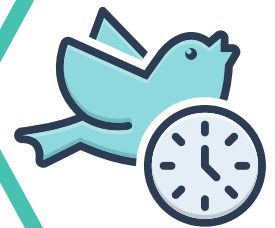
TALKING TO CHILDREN ABOUT MENTAL HEALTH: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Normalization: Discussing mental health early reduces stigma and helps children view it as an integral part of overall well-being, reducing potential shame or embarrassment if they or others face mental health issues.



Early Identification: Parents, caregivers, and teachers are more likely to notice signs of mental health concerns in children if they are made aware of what signs and symptoms to watch for.

Prevention: Understanding mental health can help children learn healthy coping mechanisms and emotional regulation skills. Early intervention can prevent mild concerns from escalating into more serious conditions.

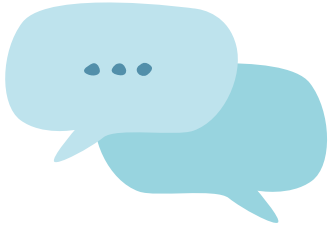


Communication Skills: Talking about mental health promotes open communication, helping children to seek help and share concerns with trusted adults when needed.

Building Empathy: Discussing mental health fosters empathy and compassion in children, enabling them to provide support and understanding to friends and family facing mental health challenges.



Creating Safe Spaces: Encouraging open conversations about mental health at home and in schools creates safe spaces for children to express their feelings without fear of judgement.



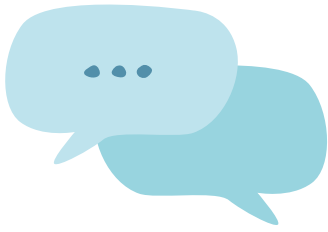
Talking to your child about mental health

When discussing mental health with children, use age-appropriate language and examples. Strike a balance between sharing information and asking questions, without overwhelming them with complex or distressing concepts.

Here are some guidelines to help:

- 1. Use simple language:** Explain mental health in a way that is easy for a child or pre-teen to understand. Avoid using complex medical terms or jargon.
- 2. Use examples:** Use everyday examples to help them grasp the concept of mental health. For instance, clarify that feeling sad or anxious is natural, but if it starts to interfere with their daily life it could indicate a mental health issue.
- 3. Encourage open communication:** Let them know it is okay to talk about their feelings and that you are there to listen and support them. Encourage them to share any concerns they may have.
- 4. Be honest:** Speak openly about mental health and the different types of mental health issues. Let them know that there is nothing to be embarrassed about and that there are ways to get help.
- 5. Remind them of the importance of self-care:** Teach them about the importance of taking care of their mental health, such as getting enough sleep, eating healthy, and exercising. Model that for them!
- 6. Choose the Right Time and Place:** Find a quiet and comfortable environment where you can have focused conversations with your child. Avoid distractions or interruptions.

(more tips on next page...)



Talking to your child about mental health (continued)

7. Listen Actively: Pay close attention to what your child says. Show empathy and understanding by nodding, making eye contact, and providing reassuring responses like, “I’m here to listen and help.”

8. Validate Their Emotions: Let your child know that it’s okay to have various emotions, and there are no “good” or “bad” feelings. For example, “it’s natural to feel angry sometimes but it’s important to find healthy ways to express it.”

9. Model Healthy Behaviour: Children often learn from watching adults. Be a role model by discussing your own emotions and how you cope with them in a healthy way.

10. Avoid Scary Details: Avoid sharing graphic or distressing information about mental health conditions or treatments. Focus on general concepts of well-being, emotions, and seeking help when needed.

11. Encourage Questions: Encourage children to ask questions and provide honest, age-appropriate answers. If you don’t know the answer, it’s okay to say so and seek information together.

12. Media Supervision: Monitor the media children are exposed to, including television, movies, and the internet. Some content may depict mental health issues in a sensationalized or stigmatizing way.

CREATING A SAFE & SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT



When children feel safe, they take healthy risks, develop confidence and independence, and form strong relationships with caregivers and peers, improving their emotional well-being.



To establish a secure environment, set clear and fair rules and boundaries for children to understand and follow.



Give children the opportunity to express themselves openly and share their feelings in a non-judgmental and supportive way, This helps children develop healthy coping mechanisms and build resilience.

BUILDING RESILIENCE

in young children

Resilience is an important skill for children to learn as it allows them to effectively navigate and overcome challenging situations. It helps them develop the ability to handle setbacks in a positive manner.



Strategies to Foster Resilience:

BUILD STRONG RELATIONSHIPS

Foster close bonds with trusted caregivers, family, and friends.

PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

Allow kids to tackle appropriate challenges and guide them towards solutions.

ENCOURAGE INDEPENDENCE

Let children make choices and decisions when possible.

GROWTH MINDSET

Remind children that setbacks can lead to growth and learning.

CELEBRATE ACHIEVEMENTS

Acknowledge and celebrate all accomplishments regardless of how minor.

ENCOURAGE PERSEVERANCE

Teach the value of not giving up, and remember that setbacks are normal.

STAY CONNECTED

Maintain open communication with your child, listen actively, and show empathy.

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

Show resilience through your own actions. How you handle challenges teaches kids to do the same.

“We all have days when we feel down. What’s something you can do to take care of yourself when that happens?”

“It’s natural to feel sad or worried sometimes. Do you ever feel that way? Can you tell me more about it?”

“How are you feeling today? Is there anything on your mind that you’d like to share with me?”

“We need to take care of our minds, just like we take care of our bodies. What are some ways to do that?”

“What are some things that make you feel better when you’re feeling stressed or upset?”



CONVERSATION STARTERS

Some age-appropriate examples of how to openly discuss mental health with children.

KNOW THE SIGNS: Is Your Child Struggling With Their Mental Health?



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Children do not communicate the same way as adults. Observe them closely, talk openly with them, and seek help from a child mental health professional if there are concerns of ongoing struggles. Early intervention and support are crucial in young children as it promotes healthy development and communication.

Changes in Eating or Sleeping

Notable changes in eating (increase or decrease) and sleep patterns (nightmares, trouble falling asleep, or frequent waking)

Physical Complaints

Expressing emotional struggles through physical complaints such as stomachaches or headaches

Increased worry or Fear

Experiencing excessive worry in certain situations like school, separation from caregivers, or unfamiliar situations

Trouble Concentrating

Struggling to maintain focus or complete school tasks and other non-academic activities

Emotional Outbursts

Intense emotional outbursts such as tantrums, anger or sadness that seem disproportionate to the situation

Self-Harm or Suicidal Thoughts

In more serious cases, intentionally harming themselves or expressing thoughts of wanting to self-harm or even end their lives

Regression

Reverting to earlier stages of development can be used to cope with stress or trauma. This can include bedwetting, thumbsucking or “baby talk”

Changes in Mood

Sudden mood shifts like prolonged sadness, irritability or a flat/dulled response. It can also appear as a fluctuation between emotions

Loss of Interest

Withdrawing from social activities or loss of interest in previously enjoyed hobbies



Books and Movies to Continue the Conversation

Children's Books

- *Don't Feed The WorryBug* by Andi Green
- *Hector's Favorite Place* by Jo Rooks
- *How Big Are Your Worries, Little Bear?* By Jayneen Sanders
- *The Monster Parade* by Wendy O'Leary
- *Pilar's Worries* by Victoria M. Sanchez
- *Ruby Finds A Worry* by Tom Percival
- *What's Up, Maloo?* By Genevieve Godbout
- *Whimsy's Heavy Things* by Julie Kraulis
- *Breathing Makes It Better* by Christopher Willard & Wendy O'Leary
- *The Crayons' Book of Feelings* by Drew Daywalt
- *I Am Human: A Book of Empathy* by Susan Verde

Movies

- Inside Out
- Soul
- Up
- Wonder Park
- Turning Red
- Luca
- Frozen II
- Finding Nemo
- The Good Dinosaur

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The following section of the handbook provides information and activities for parents to engage in *WITH* their children.



What is **MENTAL HEALTH?**



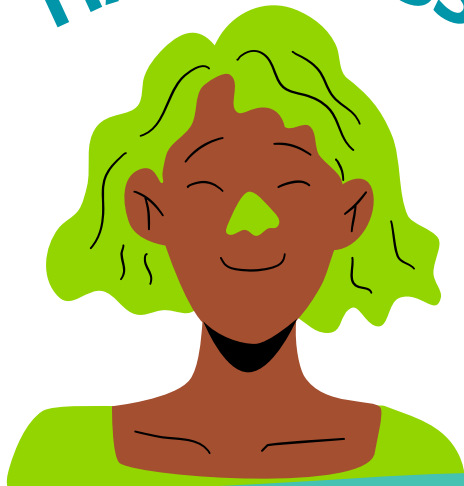
Mental health is all about our thoughts, feelings, and actions. Just as we care for our bodies to be healthy, we must also care for our minds to be happy and well.

Our minds can feel many different emotions- like happiness, when playing with friends, or sadness and worry when we're upset. It's natural to have different feelings, and it's important to talk about them.

Taking care of our mental health means doing things that make us feel better, like talking to people we trust, or doing things we enjoy, like drawing, reading, or playing games. It's important to be kind to ourselves and to others.

NAMING OUR EMOTIONS!

HAPPINESS



What this feels like: Can make us smile and laugh, energized, joyful
When might we feel this: When we are with someone we love!

SADNESS



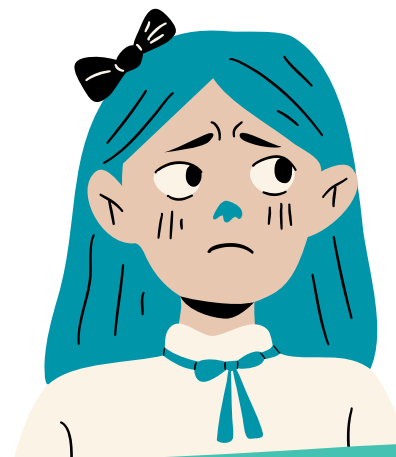
What this feels like: Heavy, slow and tired, the need to cry
When might we feel this: When we break our favorite toy

ANGER



What this feels like: Fast heart beat, tense muscles, sweating, red face
When might we feel this: When someone yells or is mean to us

FEAR



What this feels like: Fast heart beat, tense muscles, upset stomach, shaking
When might we feel this: When there is a thunderstorm outside

SIGNS OF MENTAL HEALTH STRUGGLES



Remember, if you ever feel like this, it's okay to talk to someone you trust, like a parent or a teacher. Sometimes talking can help you feel better and understand your feelings.

Not Wanting to Play

You might have lost interest in playing and having fun with your friends.



Feeling Sad or Angry

You may find yourself feeling sad or mad, even when good things happen.



Trouble Paying Attention

Sometimes, you might have trouble focusing or paying attention in school or other activities.



Eating Habits Change

Your eating patterns might change. You might eat a lot more or you might not feel like eating at all.



Worrying Too Much

You may feel nervous about things all the time, even when it doesn't seem like there's a big reason to worry.



Sleep changes

You might be having a hard time falling asleep or waking up a lot, or maybe you feel like sleeping all the time.

SUPPORTING OUR FRIENDS & **THEIR MENTAL HEALTH**



Be a Good Listener

Listen when your friend needs to talk. Simply being there can make a world of difference!



Be Kind

Try to understand how your friend feels. You can say things like, "I'm here for you" or "I'm sorry you're feeling sad."

Share Coping Skills

Help your friend relax by sharing your own calming tricks, like counting to ten while you breathe slowly.



Play Together

Invite your friend to join in on games and fun activities- it can help them feel better!



Encourage Your Friends

Use nice words to make your friend feel good, like “You can do it!” or “I believe in you!”

Be Patient

Sometimes, your friend might feel better quickly, and other times it might take them a while.



Respect Privacy

If your friend doesn’t want to talk about their feelings, that’s okay. Let them know that you’ll be there when they need you.

Tell a Grown-Up

If you’re really worried about your friend, don’t keep it a secret, tell a grown-up you trust.

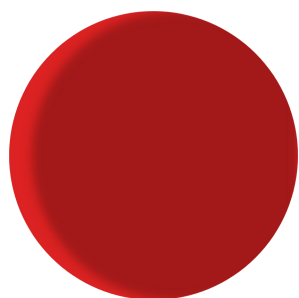


Take Care of You

Remember, it’s important to take care of yourself too. When you’re happy and healthy, you can be a better friend.

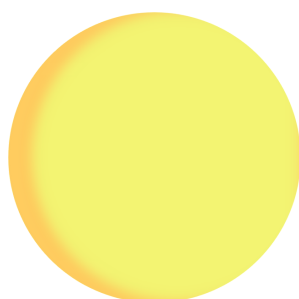
TRAFFIC LIGHTS FOR MY EMOTIONS

Just like traffic lights tell cars when to stop, slow down, or go, it can tell us the same for our emotions.



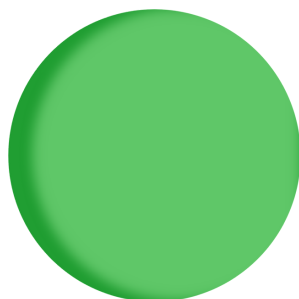
Red Light Emotions

- **Stop** what you're doing. Breathe.
- Red light emotions are strong and difficult feelings like anger, frustration, fear, or worry.
- What do you feel like when you have these emotions?



Yellow Light Coping Skills

- **Slow down.** Wait and think.
- Do things to help you calm down like taking deep breaths, counting to ten, or moving your body.
- Try telling someone how you're feeling, what brought this on, and what might help you feel better.



Green Light Actions

- **Go ahead!** You know your mind and body best!
- When you learn ways to work with your emotions, you know how to handle things in the future.
- How does it feel to be able to work with your emotions?

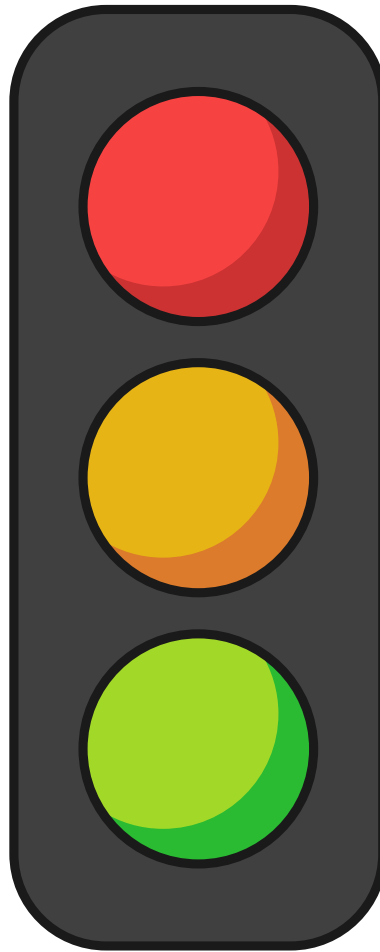
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TRAFFIC LIGHT FOR MY EMOTIONS

Stop and breathe.

Wait and think...

Go ahead!



Take Deep Breaths



Listen to Music



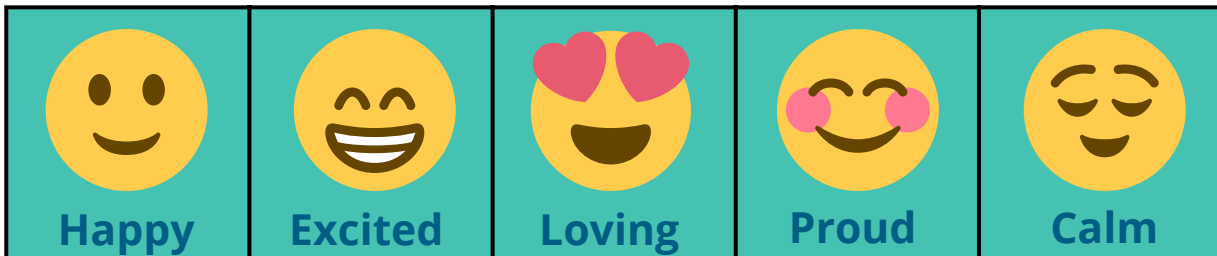
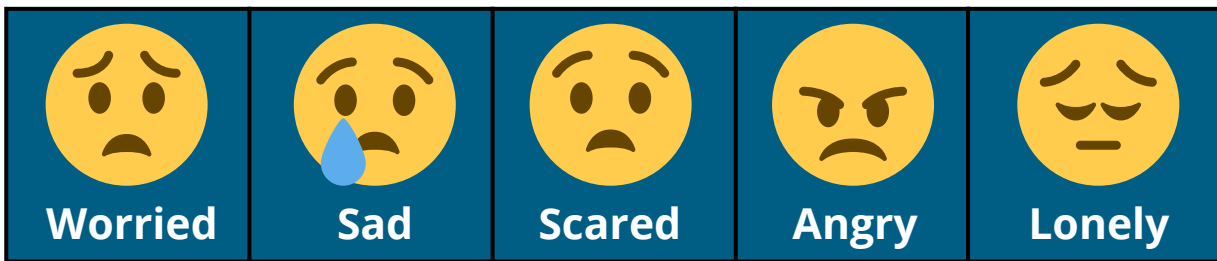
Ask for Help



Move your Body

My Tools:

My Feelings:



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Mindfulness 5-4-3-2-1

Find:

- 5 things you can **SEE**.
- 4 things you can **TOUCH**.
- 3 things you can **HEAR**.
- 2 things you can **SMELL**.
- 1 thing you can **TASTE**.

Sensory Exploration



Collect objects with various textures, smells, and sounds. Encourage children to mindfully explore these objects and describe their sensory observations.

Shine Initiative Mindfulness Activities FOR KIDS

Nature Walks



Take a walk in nature and ask children to notice the sounds, smells, and textures around them. Encourage them to touch leaves, smell flowers, and listen to birds.

Worry Monster



Have children decorate a cardboard box as a fun monster and cut out a mouth. Next, have them write or draw their worries on small pieces of paper and “feed” their worries to the monster.

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Things I Can Do When I Need to

CALM DOWN

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NAME MY FEELINGS



DEEP BREATHING



WRITE A LETTER



IMAGINE A QUIET PLACE



CHILD POSE



DRINK WATER



WARM BATH



RUN OR JOG



5-4-3-2-1
GROUNDING
TECHNIQUE



HUG



PAINT



BLOW BUBBLES



SMELL MY FAVORITE SCENT



SQUEEZE SOMETHING



LISTEN TO MUSIC

100

99

98

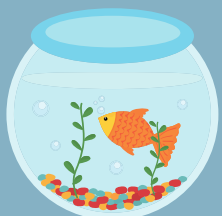
COUNT BACKWARDS



EXPLORE NATURE



PRESS AND RELEASE PALMS TOGETHER



WATCH FISH



NOISE CANCELLING HEADPHONES



PLAY WITH A PET



HUG A TOY



WRAP UP IN A BLANKET



COUNT HEARTBEATS

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Quick Ways to **calm** down

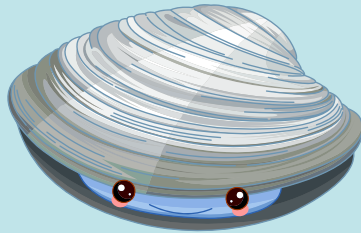
Sea Life Sensory Skills



Pufferfish Puff

Puff out your cheeks like a pufferfish does!

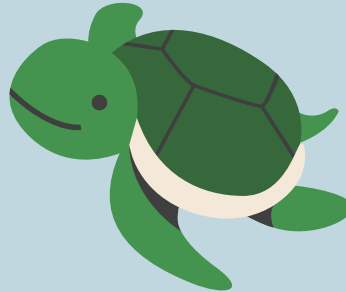
Fill your cheeks with air and hold for 5 seconds.



Clam Cuddle

Wrap your arms around yourself like a clam shell!

Place each hand on the opposite shoulder and squeeze.



Turtle Tongue

Poke your tongue out like a turtle pokes out its neck!

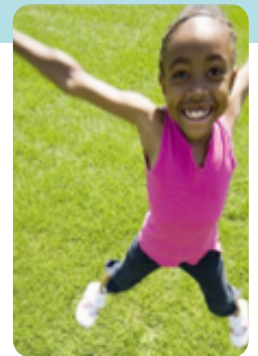
Stick your tongue out and quickly hide it again. Repeat.



Starfish Stretch

Stretch out your arms and legs like a starfish!

Reach your arms and legs out wide. You can lie down, too!



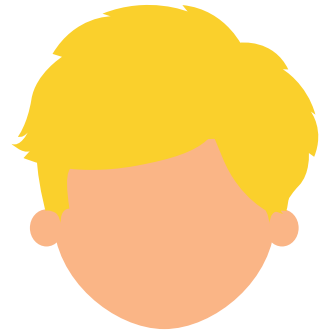
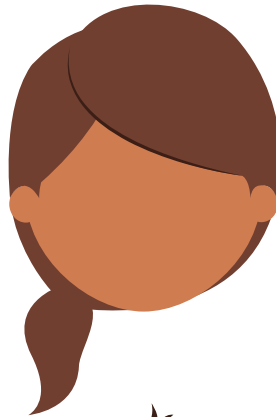
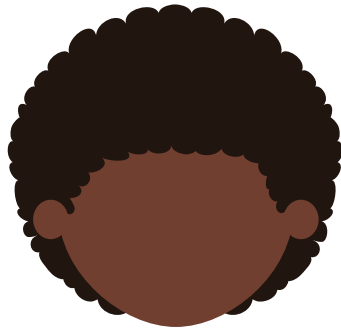
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Shine **Feeling Faces**

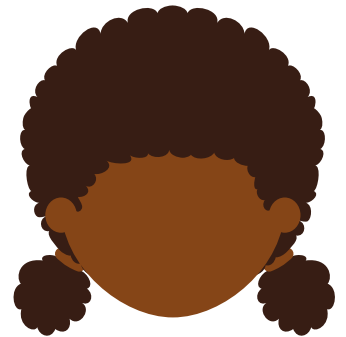
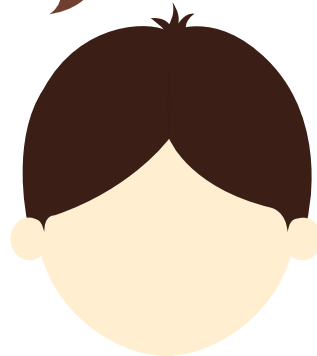
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There are many different ways to express our feelings! Next to the name of the emotion on each row of faces, show 3 different ways that emotion might look!

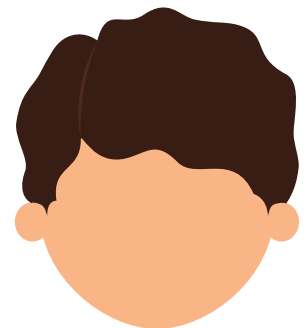
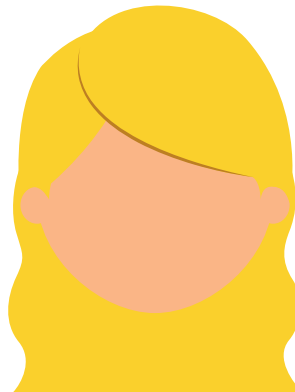
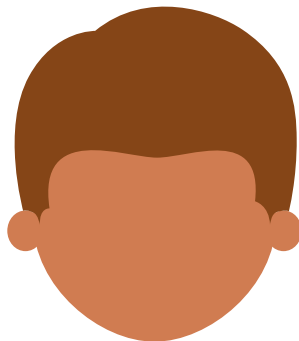
Happy



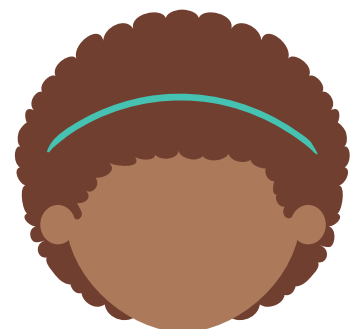
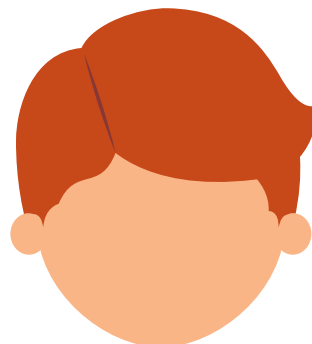
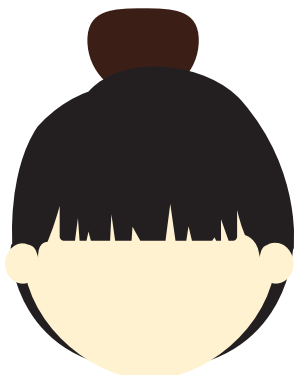
Sad



Scared



Angry



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Helpful Hexagon



Fill out each hexagon with ways you can relax or help yourself feel better when you are feeling sad, angry, worried, etc. Then cut along the **dotted lines only**, and fold each hexagon in to create your own pocket-sized Helpful Hexagon!

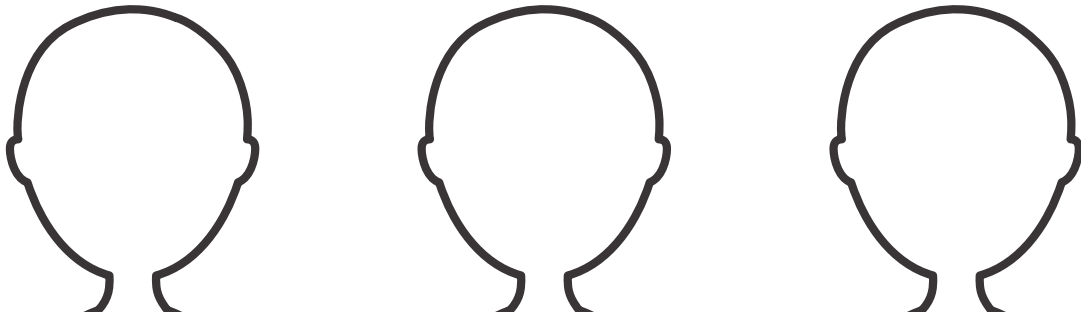
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SHOW of Emotion

A time I felt sad, scared or angry was...

I felt this way because...

These are ways the feeling could show on my face



What my body does when I'm feeling this emotion

A large, irregularly shaped area with horizontal lines, intended for drawing or writing about physical actions or body reactions when feeling the emotion.

Draw where you feel the emotion

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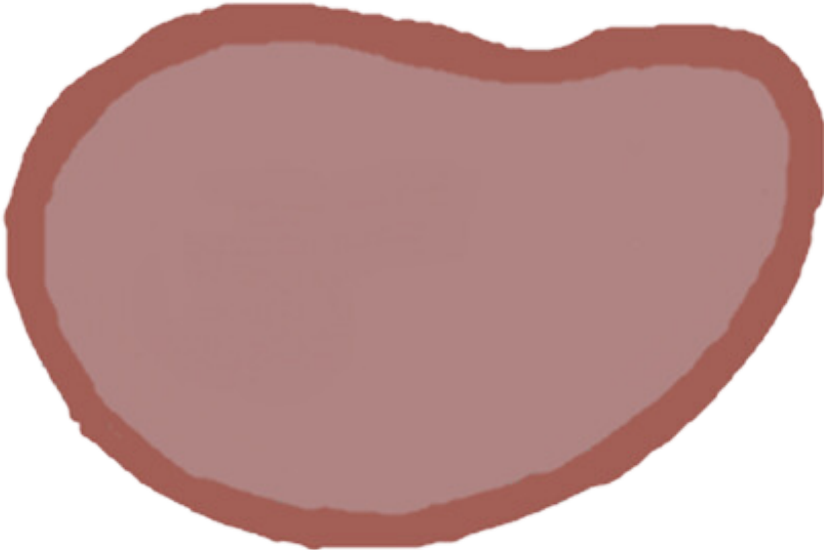
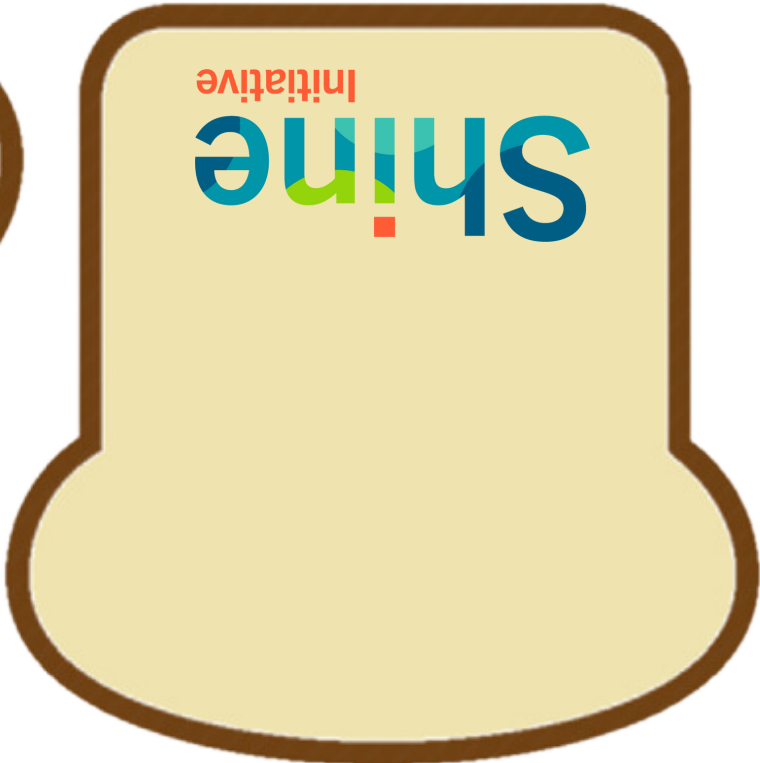
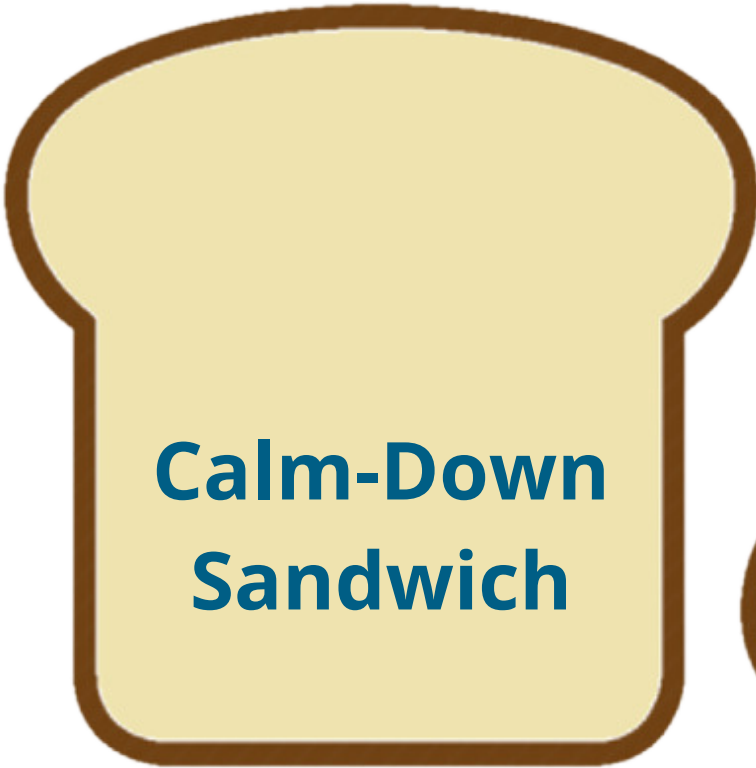
Calm-Down Sandwich Instructions

It can be difficult for children to regulate emotions and use coping skills when they're feeling escalated. Having a visual, tangible plan can help them learn to manage difficult situations.



Steps:

- Write the child's name on the top piece of Bread.
- Select coping skills (that you know work!) and write on the inner pieces of the sandwich...add as many as you'd like! The child can choose from a list of provided skills, or add their own.
- Assemble the Calm-Down sandwich...we think an actual sandwich bag really completes the look!
- When the child starts to feel overwhelmed, frustrated, or just needs a break from a situation, help direct them to their Calm-Down Sandwich.



How Do You Feel Today?



HAPPY



NERVOUS



ANGRY



SURPRISED



EXCITED



SAD



CALM



CONFUSED



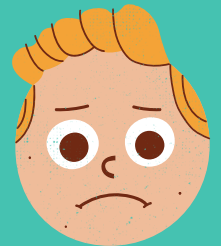
SLEEPY



WORRIED



TIRED



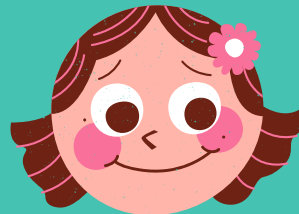
SHOCKED



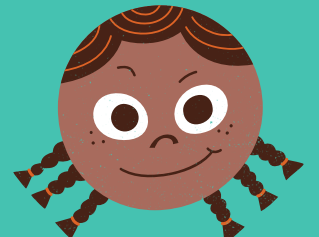
SICK



SCARED



SHY



PROUD

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SHOW
YOUR
FEELINGS

TAKE
UP
SPACE

HAVE
BAD
DAYS



IT'S OK
TO...

MAKE
MISTAKES

BE
YOURSELF

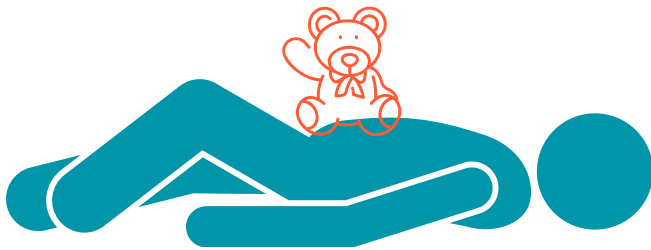
BE
LESS
THAN
PERFECT

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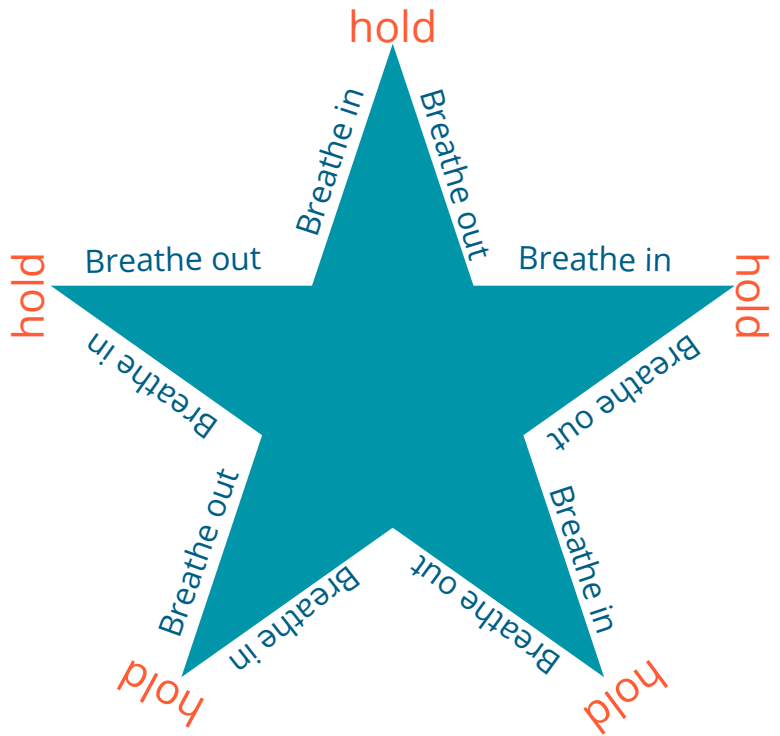
Breathing Exercises

Buddy Breathing

- 1 Lay flat on your back
- 2 Put your buddy (like a teddy bear) on your belly
- 3 Breathe in & watch your buddy go up
- 4 Breathe out & watch your buddy go down

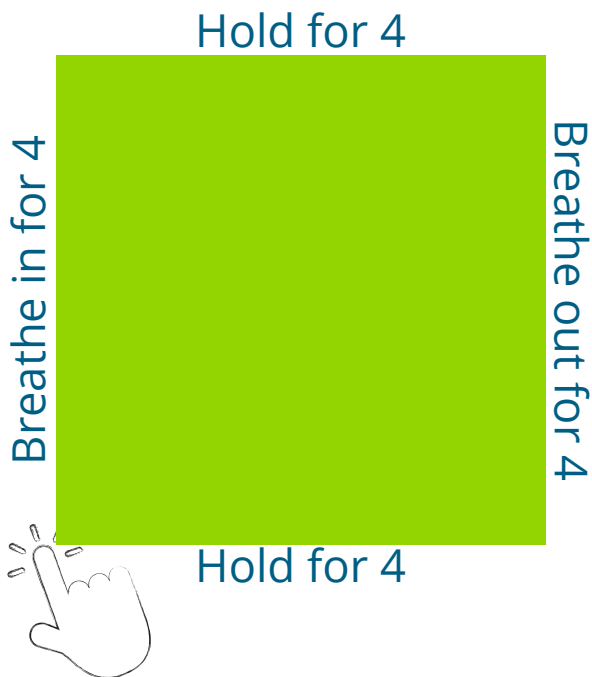


Star Breathing



Trace the star, Repeat as needed

Box Breathing



Trace the box, follow the instructions.
Repeat as needed!

Rainbow Breathing



Trace the rainbow so your hands meet above your head

Slowly bring your hands back down to your side

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Play Therapy

PLAY THERAPY USES VARIOUS FORMS OF CREATIVE EXPRESSION TO HELP CHILDREN COMMUNICATE THEIR THOUGHTS, FEELINGS, AND EXPERIENCES.



ART THERAPY

Children use art materials like crayons, markers, and clay to create drawings and other creations. Artwork can serve as a medium for expressing emotions and exploring inner thoughts.



PUPPET PLAY

Puppets can act as a bridge for children to express themselves. They can use the puppets to engage in role-playing and conversations, allowing them to communicate their feelings indirectly.



MUSIC & MOVEMENT

Incorporating music, dance, and movement can help children express themselves and release pent-up energy and emotions.

STORYTELLING



Children are encouraged to create stories or engage in imaginative play with toys and props. This helps them process experiences, express feelings, and explore solutions to problems.

- A Parent's Guide to Play Therapy:
- Use play as communication
- Listen actively
- Help with emotional recognition
- Join in when invited
- Encourage problem-solving
- Be patient and non-judgemental

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR SUPPORT



Shine Initiative: Provides resources, awareness, education and accessible ways to have conversations about mental health for young people and the adults in their lives.

www.shineinitiative.org

National Institute of Mental Health: Provides information on mental health disorders and treatments, as well as research studies. **www.nih.gov**

American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry: Offers resources for parents, caregivers, and educators to help children with mental health challenges. **www.aacap.org**

Child Mind Institute: Provides resources for parents and educators on a range of mental health topics, including anxiety, depression, and ADHD. **www.childmind.org**

Crisis Text Line: A free, 24/7 text-based support service for people in crisis. ***Text HOME to 741741 to connect with a trained crisis counselor.***

SAMHSA National Helpline: Provides free and confidential treatment referral and information services for individuals and families facing mental and/or substance use disorders.

Call 1-800-662-HELP (4357)